

Melamine Fact Sheet

STAFF INFORMATION

What is melamine?

Melamine is a white powder used in making plastic products. It does not occur naturally in food.

What are the health risks of melamine consumption?

Melamine can cause kidney stones or renal failure in severe cases. FDA has set an allowable threshold for melamine at 1 part per million in infant formula. Trace levels of melamine are unavoidable in some foods.

Melamine contamination

Chinese milk and infant formula scandal – In September 2008 several companies were implicated in a scandal involving milk and infant formula. It is suspected that melamine was added to fool government protein content tests after water was added to dilute the milk. In some batches of tainted formula, melamine was detected in amounts over 6,000 parts per million. Six deaths and almost 300,000 illnesses have been linked to milk products consumed by infants and children in China.

Infant formula in the US – Melamine has been detected in trace amounts in some infant formulas sold in the United States. US formula companies do not use melamine as a direct additive; Melamine can be absorbed from manufacturing equipment and/or packaging. All of the melamine detected in US infant formulas has been under the allowable 1 part per million threshold. In addition, there have been no reports of human illness from melamine consumption in the United States.

Risks of formula feeding

WIC promotes breastfeeding as the optimal source of nutrition for infants. Melamine contamination is a risk of formula feeding. Promote breastfeeding by emphasizing that breast milk is melamine and plastic-free.

USDA recommendations

FDA has not determined any immediate health risk to the infants consuming formula sold in the United States. Therefore, FNS is not recommending that WIC agencies take any action that affects the infant formula issued to WIC participants.

Content Source:

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/melamine/chinafood.asp>

<http://www.who.int/csr/media/faq/QAmelamine/en/>

USDA talking points, email from Tecla Coleman-Sloan, received 12/1/08